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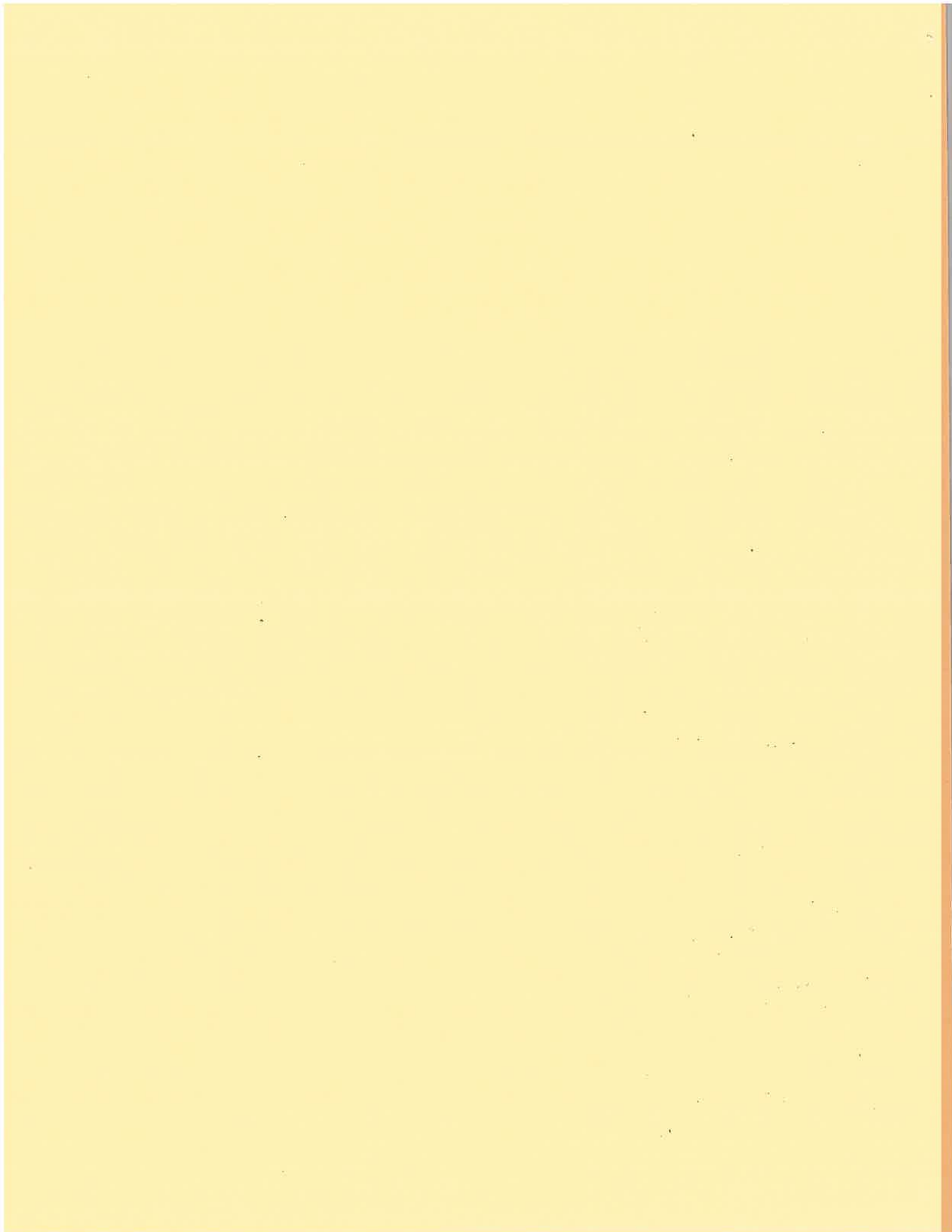
**RADHAKRISHNAN AND HIS UNIVERSAL SYNTHESIS:  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

by

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Sir Sarvepelli Radhakrishnan has been acknowledged as one of the greatest Indian philosophers who has ever lived. He has contributed more to the important task of creating a synthesis between Eastern and Western thought than any other philosopher to date. This essay will interpret the goal and important constituents of Radhakrishnan's universal synthesis and then provide an evaluation thereof, keeping in mind recent developments in this field.<sup>1</sup>

This article is divided in two parts: 1) the first part offers an analysis of the term "universal" in the context of Radhakrishnan's world view, and then delineates some of the important components of his philosophico-religious world view; 2) the second part provides an evaluation of his universal synthesis and critically examines the ways in which scholars have reacted to the challenge of Radhakrishnan's universal synthesis.

## I

In our day to day discourse, we use the term "universal" to mean a concept or a thing to imply that it "pertains to" or "characterizes the whole" without any exceptions. The Oxford dictionary defines the term as something which includes and encompasses the whole, either collectively or distributively. It gives a sense of commonalities, unity, that exists among ideas, objects, or persons. In the context of religion, the term can be construed to imply that essentially all religions of humankind are derived from or reflect one universal faith. This, in turn,

implies that all religions are essentially one and that diversity and plurality among various religions are due to cultural and historical reasons.

Although the term "universal" occurs throughout his writings, Radhakrishnan never attempts to give an explicit definition of the term. However, three definite senses can be discerned from his writings: he uses the term 1) to describe the ultimate reality in a metaphysical and religious context, 2) to signify the essential harmony of all religions, and 3) to express those ideas which cross the frontiers of nations and are not limited to a particular society or creed.

Lawrence Hyde, in his article, "Radhakrishnan's Contribution to Universal Religion," notes two aspects of universality in the field of religion.

It can mean a tolerant recognition of every form of religious belief and practice which brings man nearer to the Divine, together with the rejection of the claim that any one type of faith has an absolute and final value. But it can mean also the impulse to enrich one's own form of religion by incorporating within it as wide a range of creative elements as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Hyde further notes that "most apologists for universalism in the religious realm concern themselves almost exclusively with the first . . ."<sup>3</sup> and this is certainly true of Radhakrishnan.

There is no doubt that Radhakrishnan believed in the tolerant appreciation of faiths other than one's own. He states: "The greatest of the temptations we must overcome is to think that our own religion is the only true religion, our own vision of reality is the only authentic vision."<sup>4</sup> Hyde believes that Radhakrishnan was "exclusively" concerned with the first aspect

of universality outlined above. It seems to me, however, that the second sense occurs throughout his writings. Indeed, his notion of unity and synthesis is predicated upon as well as implied by universality in its second aspect. For example, in "Fragments of a Confession," he states:

A study of other living religion helps and enhances the appreciation of our own faith. If we adopt a wider historical view we obtain a more comprehensive vision and understanding of spiritual truth . . . . It is our duty and privilege to enlarge our faculties of curiosity, of understanding, and realize the spaciousness of our common ground.

He reiterates the same point in "Reply to Critics" when he notes: "By understanding the emphases of other faiths, we enlarge our own. We contract and conciliate distant affections. We recognize the elements of truth and dignity of values of spirit included in other faiths."<sup>6</sup> To this end, he encourages the study of world religions and calls for an inter-religious understanding and co-operation.

Radhakrishnan's universal perspective was the result of his belief that the "different religious traditions are similar," that they "have one source." He affirms:

The different religious traditions clothe the one Reality in various images and their visions could embrace and fertilise each other, so as to give mankind a many-sided perfection, the spiritual radiance of Hinduism, the faithful obedience of Judaism, the life of beauty of Greek Paganism, the noble compassion of Buddhism, the vision of the divine love of Christianity, and the spirit of resignation to the sovereign lord of Islam. All these represent different aspects of the inward spiritual life, projections on the intellectual plane of the ineffable experiences of the human spirit.

Accordingly, synthesis, unity, tolerance, and love became the key ingredients of his universalistic perspective.

In his detailed and ambitious work Eastern Religions and Western Thought, he reflects upon how the encounter between East and West frames his attempt at an integral synthesis:

Today the whole world is in fusion and all is in motion. East and West are fertilizing each other, not for the first time. May we not strive for a philosophy, which will combine the best of European humanism and Asiatic religion, a philosophy profounder and more living than either, endowed with great spiritual and ethical force, which will conquer the hearts of men and compel people to acknowledge its sway?<sup>8</sup>

This "free interchange of ideas" will, Radhakrishnan maintained, prepare for "the world's yet unborn soul."<sup>9</sup>

Radhakrishnan's statement of his universalistic world-view of the truth and "religion of the spirit and unity of mankind" which will prepare for the "world's unborn soul was founded on an idealistic view of life. Accordingly, he reaffirmed the basic truths of religious and philosophical idealism. He notes:

A study of the present situation in religion leads me to think that it may be of some interest if this course is devoted to the vindication of the idealist attitude in a changing world . . . . These lectures endeavor to restate a point of view which is nothing new but constitutes the very essence of the great philosophic tradition of idealism.<sup>10</sup>

In response to D.M. Datta's question whether one can attempt a universal synthesis on a position other than idealism,

Radhakrishnan says:

I do believe that the great idealist tradition has in it the possibility of bringing East and West together in a closer union on the plane of mind and spirit . . . . It is my conviction that, if the achievements of science and criticism are to be harnessed for right ends, we should develop certain universal aims, and the idealist tradition of the world provides us with these goals for human endeavor and action.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that in this reply, Radhakrishnan does not maintain that a universal synthesis can be attempted only on an idealistic conception of life. Additionally, as is widely known, Radhakrishnan's outlook was consistent with Vedānta. However, in his use of the word idealism he did not limit it to simply the Vedāntic idealism. In An Idealist View of Life and Eastern Religions and Western Thought, he uses the term to refer to both Indian and Western thinkers.

He also calls his philosophical and religious idealism "Perennial Philosophy," "Universal Religion," "Integral Experience," and "Religion of the Spirit." No matter by what name he calls it, Radhakrishnan attempted to incorporate in it the best of both the worlds. More importantly, they all testify to the spiritual nature of reality. The supreme has three simultaneous aspects or poises of being: the transcendent Absolute (Brahman), the creative freedom (Īśvara), and the wisdom, power, and love manifest in the world (Hiranya-garbha).<sup>1E</sup>

#### Absolute-God

The highest reality, Radhakrishnan maintains, is ineffable. Accordingly, it cannot be described. All attempts to describe it are bound to fail because all such attempts limit the object that is being described. The highest reality is subject and it can never become an object. It is saccidānanda, i.e., it is sat, cit, and ānanda. These three are not the qualifying attributes of Brahman but rather the terms that express the apprehension of the highest reality by finite mind. Saccidānanda is a symbol

formulated by the human mind attempting to interpret Brahman  
-experience.

In such descriptions, there is always a danger that Brahman might be treated as an object. Therefore, it is wise to speak of Brahman via negativa--neti neti, that is, not-this, not-this. Yājñavalkya, the Upaniṣadic sage speaking of Brahman, states: "There is no better description than this; that it is not-this, not-this."<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, Brahman is our very self, or, as Upaniṣads put it: ātman is Brahman (tat tvam asi). In Radhakrishnan's words:

It is perfect being, perfect consciousness and perfect freedom, sat, cit, and ānanda. Being, truth and freedom are distinguished in the divine, but not divided. The true and ultimate condition of the human being is the divine status. The essence of life is the movement of the universal being; the essence of emotion is the play of the self-existent delight in being; the essence of thought is the inspiration of the all-pervading truth; the essence of activity is the progressive realization of a universal and self-effecting good.<sup>14</sup>

The highest spiritual experience of the identity of ātman and Brahman makes us aware of two aspects of the Supreme, its supracosmic transcendence and its cosmic universality. The Supreme, in its transcendent and non-relational aspect is called the Absolute, and in its cosmic aspect, i.e., in its relationship to the world it is God or Īśvara." While the Absolute is pure consciousness and pure freedom and infinite possibility, it appears to be God from the point of view of the one specific possibility which has become actualized. . . . This universe is for the Absolute only one possibility."<sup>15</sup>

In this context arises one of the central problems of any non-dualist philosophy, including Radhakrishnan's philosophy.



How to reconcile the transcendence of the Absolute with its cosmic universality? Or, in what sense, the Absolute can be said to be the creator of the world? In his book, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Radhakrishnan explains the relation between the two in the following words:

The way in which the relation between the absolute and God is here indicated is not the same as that either of Saṃkara or of Bradley, though it has apparent similarities to their doctrines. While the Absolute is the transcendent divine, God is the cosmic divine. While the Absolute is the total reality, God is the Absolute from the cosmic end, the consciousness that informs and sustains the world. God is, so to say, the genius of this world, its ground, which as a thought or as a possibility of the Absolute lies beyond the world in the universal consciousness of the Absolute. The possibilities or the ideal forms are the minds of the Absolute or the thoughts of the Absolute. One of the infinite possibilities is being translated into the world of space and time. Even as the world is a definite manifestation of one specific possibility of the Absolute, God with whom the worshipper stands in personal relation is the very Absolute in the world context and is not a mere appearance of the Absolute.<sup>16</sup>

The Absolute in relationship to the world is Hiranya-garbha, the "world-soul." In this aspect, the Absolute as the spirit pervades the world. "Hiranya-garbha or Brahmā is the world-soul and is subject to changes of the world. He is kārya-Brahmā or effect Brahman as distinct from Īśvara who is kāraṇa-Brahman or casual Brahman. Hiranya-garbha arises at every world-beginning and is dissolved at every world-ending."<sup>17</sup> Īśvara, on the other hand, is not subject to these changes. He is a kind of eternal God who directs the play of the world and Himself exists transcendentally.

## Māyā

Considering that the Upaniṣads reiterate that Brahman is "one only without a second," that Brahman is that state of being wherein all distinctions are obliterated, how to account for the self-expression of Brahman? In "Reply to Critics," Radhakrishnan says: "I have interpreted the doctrine of māyā so as to save the world and give to it a real meaning. This world is not an illusion; it is not nothingness. It is "derived being. It is an expression of the Absolute and not the Absolute itself." He states:

If we concentrate attention on Brahman, the Absolute, we feel that the world is not independent of Brahman but rests in Brahman. The relationship between the two cannot be logically articulated. If we turn to the personal Īśvara, we know that the world is the creation of Brahman and not its organic expression. The power of creation is called maya. If we turn to the world process which is a perpetual becoming, it is a mixture of being and non-being, sat and asat, the divine principle and prakṛti. Hiraṇya-garbha and his world are both subject to time, and should be distinguished from the eternal. But the temporal becoming is by no means false.

The passage quoted above draws our attention to the following facts regarding the nature and status of the world: 1) In the world process itself, we have the divine interacting and its status and meaning depends on the levels of reality from the temporal world-process to the Eternal, Brahman; 2) The world is an expression of the Absolute; 3) It is wrong to say that it is either sat or asat; it is sat because it exists for some time, it is asat because it does not exist all the time. Thus, it is both sat and asat.

Māyā also refers to ignorance (avidyā), by which the real nature of Brahman is concealed from us. Radhakrishnan states:

Māyā is also used for ignorance by which we do not recognise the principle of the universe. 'He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not?' This non-knowing is avidyā. It is also different from the real and the unreal. If it attains either reality or collapses into nothingness there would be no tension, no process. So the world is said to be sad-asad-vilaksana, different from real and unreal.

As to why this specific possibility, among the matrix of infinite possibilities, was chosen, Radhakrishnan says: "We can only say that it is much too difficult for us in the pit to know what is happening behind the screens. It is māyā or a mystery which we have to accept reverently."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Radhakrishnan's account of the world-process is more positive than Śaṅkara's account of the world as an appearance of Brahman which is to be transcended. Radhakrishnan emphasizes that māyā in Śaṅkara does not mean illusion, but rather refers to the fact that the world does not have an independent status. The world is a partial expression of Brahman, it is as real as a part of Brahman.<sup>22</sup>

### Intuition and Intellect

Radhakrishnan criticized Śaṅkara for not trying to relate God to the Absolute positively, which he himself was able to accomplish through his doctrine of intuition. The Absolute is the truth for our intuition; God is the truth for our intellect. He firmly believed that "if intuitive knowledge does not supply

us with universal major premises, which we can neither question nor establish our life will come to an end."<sup>23</sup>

At the outset of his chapter on "Intellect and Intuition" in An Idealist View of Life, he raises the question in the following words:

If all knowledge were of the scientific type, the contemporary challenge to religion would seem to be conclusive. The problem thus narrows itself to the reality of intuitive knowledge and conditions of its validity. Is there or is there not knowledge which by its very nature can be expressed in propositions and is yet trustworthy?<sup>24</sup>

He concludes the chapter as follows:

The archetypal Ideas of Plato, the a priori of Kant, are the contents of intuitive wisdom and the conditions of human knowledge. They point to the working of a Universal Spirit in us, the eternal subject without whose presence in the minds of man sensations would be blind and concepts barren. Intuition, faith, spiritual experience, or the testimony of scriptures in theological language is necessary for knowledge and life.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, there are various forms of knowledge: intellect, intuition, faith, among which intuition occupies the highest place. Intuition is integral experience whereas intellect is discursive. In intuition the knower and the known become identical whereas in intellect, there is a duality between subject and object.

This is not to suggest that intellect and intuition are discontinuous and separate. He explains:

Just as we have both continuity and discontinuity between matter and life and mind, so also we have both continuity and discontinuity between intuitive wisdom and intellectual knowledge. Those who believe that wisdom negates knowledge are as one-sided as those who believe that wisdom is nothing more than knowledge. As life appropriates and uses matter, as mind appropriates and uses life, so does spiritual wisdom appropriate and transform intellectual knowledge. Intellect is therefore an indispensable aid to support and clarify spiritual experience. The experience may be vitiated by

error or impaired by emotions. There may be mistake in the analysis and interpretation of primary data of experience.<sup>26</sup>

Intuitive knowledge is not non-rational, it is non-conceptual.

And, in rational intuition, both immediacy and mediacy are comprehended.

The immediacy of intuitive knowledge can be mediated through intellectual definition and analysis. We use intellect to test the validity of intuition, and communicate them to others. Intuition and intellect are complementary. We have, of course, to recognise that intuition transcends the conceptual expressions as reality does not fit into categories.<sup>27</sup>

This passage clearly sums up Radhakrishnan's position on intuition that it transcends conceptual expression, although its validity can only be tested by intuition. In other words:

. . . mediation limits intuition but without it, intuitive experience would be lost. Radhakrishnan, like Bergson, wants to insist that intuition cannot be captured by language, and at the same time, that language is the only way of expressing what can be captured, and of pointing to the transcendent or ineffable quality<sup>28</sup> of the experience which cannot be adequately expressed.

It is clear, then, that one can attain the highest knowledge only through intuition. It is wisdom, direct experience, aparokṣānūbhīti. Although both intellect and intuition belong to the self, the former deals only with a specific part, the latter uses the entire self. Additionally, if one wishes to achieve true philosophic insight, one cannot think one's way into it. Because philosophy "is not so much a conceptual reconstruction as an exhibition of insights."<sup>29</sup> And, a little later, Radhakrishnan adds: "The great truths of philosophy are not proved but seen. The philosophers convey to others visions by the machinery of logical proof. All that the critics of philosophy do is to find out whether the views are partial or total, pure or impure."<sup>30</sup>

Here, we see Radhakrishnan's justification of the Indian

conception of philosophy as an insight (darśana) of the whole experience. To make it only an intellectual pursuit is to divorce it from life. His conception of the nature of philosophy, intuition, and creative philosophizing are based on the format of religious experience. Thus, it is not surprising that Radhakrishnan emphasizes that anubhava or integral experience is the highest kind of apprehension one might have. Philosophy, for him, is not simply the pursuit of wisdom. It is "intensely practical," "a way of life," and "an enterprise of the spirit."<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, he believed that the history of the world can be understood by a study of the spirit that underlies all human beings.

#### The Religion of the Spirit

Radhakrishnan's judgment on the crisis in Western culture was unflinching. He understood the critical juncture confronting Western civilization at that point in history. Two global conflicts, as he noted, had only reinforced national egoism which, in turn, produced still greater disunity. He observes:

The barriers of dogmatic religions are sterilising men's efforts to co-ordinate their forces to shape the future. Each religion is a rival to others. There are some things which are more important than our particular allegiances: truth and humanity and that religious consciousness which is the common possession of all human beings by virtue of their spiritual endowment. So long as our group loyalties are strong and overriding we cannot belong to the general human society.<sup>32</sup>

We need a world community to establish world unity, to stop the evils of egoism, materialism, and religious exclusivism.

This unity, he believed, can be attained, not by the imposition of beliefs of this or that religion, but by acquiring a more comprehensive religious perspective. "The development of such a perspective is not a mere necessity. It is the demand of a right view of religion."<sup>33</sup>

"Religion," he believed, "is the direct apprehension of the Supreme. It is the attaining of a state of illumination. When the Reality is omnipresent, the human being is able to apprehend it directly in his inmost being."<sup>34</sup> The emphasis on the experiential nature of religion led him to reject the view that religion is simply a matter of belief and not experience. Religion is not simply a matter of chanting mantras or the performance of the rituals. It is an encounter of the individual with the Supreme. Accordingly, if religion is to become an effective force in our lives, and serve as a basis for new human community, it must become more inward and more universal, a flame which cleanses our inward being and so cleanses the world."<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, he believed that the unity of the human race can be achieved only by an inner oneness of spirit, by pursuing universal aims. There is only one Eternal religion, sanātana dharma. All religions are equally true as they are historical expressions of one universal spirit. The differences are really a matter of form and not of essence. He affirms:

If religions are to heal humanity's divisions, if they are to bring peoples nearer one another, they must take themselves seriously, forget their partisan strife, affirm that religion is a matter of spirit and not form and its loyalty is to the whole world and not simply to the members of one community.

Thus, all religions, as they share in one common spirit, are essentially one. This religion will be the religion of the future, and he identifies it as "religion of the spirit."

We can apprehend the spirit with directness and immediacy, by "Integral Insight,"<sup>37</sup> "for it brings into activity not merely a portion of our conscious being, sense or reason, but the whole."<sup>38</sup> Integral knowledge makes us aware of our whole being. This knowledge transcends the subject/object distinction. "It can be accepted as foundational. Being is Truth. Sat is cit."<sup>39</sup> This religion must not be considered to be the monopoly of one particular religious tradition, because the possibility of integral insight exists at the centre of every religion. He affirms:

When the Upaniṣads proclaim the great truth "that art thou," when the Buddha teaches that each human individual has in him the power to grow into a Buddha or Bodhisattva, when the Jews say that the "spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," when Jesus tells his hearer that the Kingdom of Heaven is within them . . . they all mean that the most important thing in life is not to be found in anything external to man but is to be found in the hidden strata of his thought and feeling.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, "Religion of the Spirit," for Radhakrishnan, emphasized the essentials of all "religions" and, consequently, the essence of "religion." It will also move the world toward more cooperation and unity. Our loyalty should be to "religion" and not to different "religions." The different "religions" are expressions of "religion" and are imperfect in their historical formulations. The diversity in traditional and historical formulations diminish when one climbs up the scale of spiritual perfection. "All the paths of ascent lead to the same mountaintop. This convergent tendency and remarkable degree of



agreement in the witness of those who reach the mountaintop are strongest proof of the of truth of religion."<sup>41</sup> What is needed today is not a fusion but a fellowship of faiths,<sup>42</sup> and the sanātana dharma can provide the basis for such a faith. Such a faith

. . . is understanding, insight, full trust in the basic reality which feeds all faiths and its power to lead us to the truth. It believes in the deeper religion of the Spirit which will be adequate for all people, vital enough to strike deep roots, powerful to unify each individual in himself and bind us all together <sup>43</sup> by the realisation of our common condition and common goal.

History, in this context, is considered as a process of spiritual evolution moving toward a culmination. Such an integral view of history allows for possible fulfillments in history. For Radhakrishnan, it is return to Brahman. The life of a human being and community is not without significance. This presupposes his interpretation of the nature of the Absolute, though describable as neti neti, is of value. Mokṣa is the realization of an individual's divine potentialities. "When one individual completes his purpose, he develops the universality of outlook characteristic of perfection, but retains his individuality as a centre of action."<sup>44</sup>

The final goal, however, is not individual mokṣa, but rather the brahmaloka, the Kingdom of God. It is a fellowship, a new order of beings, and a new kind of life on earth. When all individuals have escaped from their "alienation," "slavery to the world," there is the awakening of the Spirit in them. "When the Kingdom of Spirit is established on earth as it is in heaven above, God the antecedent becomes God the consequent. There is a coincidence of the beginning and the end."<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the attainment of spiritual freedom by all, universal salvation is the goal. In such a kingdom individuals are united by harmony, they overcome disruptions and false antinomies, transcend time, which is objectified as brahmaloka. "When everyone achieves his fulfillment, the cosmic purpose is fulfilled. Pure undistorted truth of eternity burns up the world. The end of process is continuity with the beginning and when the two coincide, cosmic existence lapses into Absolute Being."<sup>46</sup>

## II

Radhakrishnan believed that his "Universal Religion" was adequate to meet not only the needs of India, but those of all humankind. By 1922, he placed a new emphasis on Vedanta and identified it as "Hinduism." This was one of Radhakrishnan's several descriptions for Vedānta, and he also calls it "the faith of the Hindus," "the Hindu view," "the Hindu Religion," "Indian Thought," and so on. On the one hand, he admitted that it is absurd to speak of an Indian monopoly of philosophic wisdom; on the other hand, he also believed that the essential spirit of "Hinduism" is universally valid, that its message has world-wide application. There is one universal philosophy which is found in all lands and cultures, what he characterized as the "religion of the Spirit."

Therefore, it is not surprising that critics claim that Radhakrishnan's "religion of the Spirit" is "Hinduism" or "Vedānta" in disguise.<sup>46</sup>

Various Christian theologians and historians of religion have attacked Radhakrishnan's universal synthesis on different grounds. A well-known Christian theologian, Newbigin, for example, claims that Radhakrishnan's mystical experience is too individualistic to provide any kind of basis for a universal synthesis. It can only provide "the negative unity of tolerance rather than the positive unity of love." He reiterates:

But so long as the central and controlling idea is salvation through the knowledge of identity with the Supreme Self, so long as the world of multiplicity and change is believed to be unreal, Hinduism can never put a visible human community into the centre of its creed, as Christianity puts the church. The unity which it offers is the cessation of strife, not the creation of a new community.

In his critical essay "Eastern and Western Cultural Values," F.S.C. Northrop maintains that the East and West have different value systems and methodologies, and therefore, to impose one's own values on the other in the name of tolerance is to do injustice to the values of others. He notes:

When beliefs are logically contradictory, the acceptance of the one renders the toleration of the other impossible . . . . Consequently, to apply, as Radhakrishnan does, the doctrine of toleration, which is appropriate to Oriental beliefs grounded in its mode of knowing, to Western beliefs and spiritual values grounded in their different modes of knowing, is to impose a theory of value of one culture upon the domain of another culture where its application is inappropriate.<sup>48</sup>

There have been various critiques of Radhakrishnan's philosophy. In this paper, however, I have decided to concentrate on Professor Robert Minor's critique of

"Radhakrishnan on the nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance."<sup>49</sup> I have decided to use this article because Minor has written most extensively on Radhakrishnan in recent times than any other scholar I know. Secondly, among the several critiques of Radhakrishnan's philosophy, Robert Minor's may be ostensibly the most persuasive. His discussion of the possibilities for a universal faith in particular is instructive. Minor himself concedes: "The issue of tolerance in the religions of the world became crucial in Radhakrishnan's writings, for a spiritual solution, he believed, required a united spirituality, a universal faith."<sup>50</sup> Hence a universal religious synthesis generates an imperative for tolerance. Indeed, his synthesis is predicated upon as well as implied by an attitude of tolerance. And therein lies the crux of the matter.

Minor brings to his analysis of Radhakrishnan's position his usual discernment, acuity of perspective, and comprehensiveness of analysis. In fact, so lucid, clear, and self-evident is his exposition that upon further reflection only, does one begin to appreciate how seductive is his interpretation. But there are some serious deficiencies in his interpretation which subsequent analysis will reveal. Hence, with all due appreciation for the brilliance of Minor's analysis, some doubts remain. Accordingly, it is my intent in this section of the paper to question anew the adequacy of his interpretation, and further, to suggest some real deficiencies and oversights within that interpretation. Minor states:

Though Radhakrishnan attempted to define tolerance in what he considered a more positive manner, his approach limited

tolerance to appreciation and acceptance of other religious positions, especially theistic positions, only as they fit into his own religious stance. His own position was treated as absolute, without having its absolute status ever questioned. Thus, Radhakrishnan's tolerance always affirmed exclusively his own position and protected him from the challenge of other positions. It functions as dogma, as an unchallengeable creed.<sup>51</sup>

In his article, "Religion and World Unity," Radhakrishnan discusses "two sides" of tolerance, "a negative and a positive one." Negatively, he rejects the claim that any one type of religion "has absolute, final, universal, and exclusive validity."<sup>52</sup> "The positive side is a sensitiveness to truth wherever it is found, an appreciation of the values found in other religions, a creative assimilation of the elements of truth and a consequent enrichment of our own beliefs."<sup>53</sup> The positive side of tolerance, Minor notes, is very important for Radhakrishnan because Radhakrishnan maintains that in India we have had "a peaceful coexistence of different religions. It is not mere passive coexistence but an active fellowship, a close inter-relation of the best of different religions. Coexistence is the first step and fraternity is the goal."<sup>54</sup> However, "appreciation and acceptance," Minor further notes, "does not mean an affirmation of everything which a religion teaches, but only what is considered by Radhakrishnan, true, valuable, best, within the religions one confronts. It is at this point the limitations of tolerance are visible in Radhakrishnan's thought,"<sup>55</sup> because the determinant of what is true, best, and valuable in Radhakrishnan is his own stance, the experience of the identity of Brahman and Ātman, tat tvam asi. Thus, Radhakrishnan's positive tolerance is in reality "only a toleration of his own position, while the negative definition of

tolerance as putting up with is practiced in accepting the other positions as lower, as subordinate, as even possibly 'superstitions.'<sup>56</sup>

That Radhakrishnan takes a position consistent with the teachings of Vedānta is widely known. There is enough textual material to document that his philosophico-religious synthesis rests on an idealist view of life. Apparently, this perspective like any other, provided him with a frame of reference within which other perspectives were analyzed and judged. If to have such a framework upon which to base judgment implies a "dogma," then perhaps almost all of us will have to admit that we are dogmatic in some sense. We always see things through our own frames of reference. However, having a frame of reference cannot be equated with the possession of a "dogma." In fact, it depends on how you use the frame of reference, the point of view with which you begin.

For example, Radhakrishnan treats the Upaniṣadic and Advaitin doctrine tat tvam asi (that art thou) as a simple statement of an experienced fact. Therefore, this statement was neither a dogma or a creedal statement for Radhakrishnan. Minor, however, believes that this statement functions as a dogma in Radhakrishnan's thought because it was "an affirmation not criticized as affirmation or interpretation."<sup>57</sup> He further notes that this becomes "the governing principle by which Radhakrishnan accepts or rejects other religious positions . . . . It is the test by which one can know 'the true, the best, what is valuable, the value,' and 'the elements of truth' of the positions which

are found in the world religions."<sup>58</sup> He then argues that when one has a dogma, one cannot do adequate justice to the truths of other traditions if they conflict with his own dogma, i.e., one cannot positively tolerate it, one can only negatively tolerate it in the sense of "putting up with." That is why early on in his exposition, Minor outlines the distinction between negative and positive aspects of tolerance. From that distinction, Minor then argues, perhaps successfully, that Radhakrishnan had a vantage point for assessing all other creeds, doctrines, and religious and philosophical assertions. In other words, because he had this "dogmatic" position from which he analyzed and judged everything else, he could not positively tolerate the contradictory assertions without doing violence to their cultural and historical context. The law of contradiction demands that one cannot simultaneously affirm the truth of two contradictory propositions. Thus there are inherent limits to the possibility of positive tolerance when one has a perspective from which to get a perspective on the alternative perspectives--and that is where Minor's analysis stops. To me this is not terribly productive or illuminating. I believe it is more important to analyze what are the philosophic implications that ensue? What does this "dogma" produce for us? What is important about this "dogma" is not its identity as a set of philosophic propositions, but rather its meaning and significance for Radhakrishnan.

For Radhakrishnan, a "philosophy becomes dogmatic, if the assertions of the Scripture are looked upon as superior to the

evidence of the senses and the conclusions of reason."<sup>59</sup> In his "Reply to Critics," he clearly states:

While the general spirit of Śaṅkara's philosophy is commended in my writings, on many essential points I have developed on independent lines. My endeavor has been to expound a philosophy, not to state a dogmatic theology, a philosophy which offers an interpretation of the universe, which is at once rational and spiritual, which depends on logical reflection and not on acts of faith.<sup>60</sup>

He himself was very much aware of conflicts, contradictions, that existed in the Vedānta of Śaṅkara. He states:

The anxiety to be loyal as far as possible to both Buddhism and Vedāntism appears to be the explanation of much of the inconsistency of Śaṅkara's philosophy. God or the Absolute he cannot give up as a Vedantin. But when, with the Buddhist, he admits that the finite is illusory, his Absolute becomes something in which all is lost and nothing is found again . . . . But there is no denying that the positive method Śaṅkara intends to pursue as a Vedantin and the negative method he does sometimes pursue as an interpreter of Buddhism end in conflict and contradiction.<sup>61</sup>

In An Idealist View of Life, Radhakrishnan criticized Upanisads and Śaṅkara for trying to express the nature of the Absolute in negative terms: "There is a danger in these negative descriptions. By denying all attributes and relations we expose ourselves to the charge of reducing the ultimate being to bare existence which is absolute vacuity."<sup>62</sup> He admits that Veda or śruti is generally considered to be an authoritative source of knowledge in Indian thought: And we should accept Vedic statements only if we feel convinced that these wise had better means than we have of forming a judgment on the matter in question."<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, he introduces a revised conception of the Scripture.

The old days when the Scriptures were accepted on trust that God was their author are no more. There is a new approach today. We do not accept scriptural documents as books apart



from other books, unquestionable in their accuracy and advice. The view that they<sup>64</sup> are the inherent word of God does not carry conviction.

Moreover, faith "is not blind acquiescence in external authority. It is the response of the whole man which includes assent of intellect and energy of will."<sup>65</sup> Therefore, he would not ask anybody to accept tat tvam asi dogmatically if one is not convinced of its truth. Minor, correctly notes that Radhakrishnan accepts tat tvam asi as an experienced fact. The real issue, however, is: what does the doctrine purport to do? Why is it so significant for Radhakrishnan?

For Radhakrishnan, spirit is the symbol of unity and existence. Spirit is found in the inner depth of one's being and it reveals itself as true being. The experience is not unique to Hinduism. He cites several examples from different religious traditions which testify to the relationship between individual and the Supreme Spirit. he note: "The Biblical affirmation 'the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord;'" St. John's belief that "spirit is 'the light that lightest every man that cometh into the world;" and Descartes' query, "How could I doubt or desire. how could I be conscious, that is to say, that anything is wanting in me, and that I am not altogether perfect, if I had not within me the idea of a being more perfect than myself, by comparison with whom I recognize the defects of my own nature?"<sup>66</sup> point to a relationship between the individual and the Supreme spirit. No one would deny that Radhakrishnan accepted tat tvam asi. However, with the help of this affirmation which is found in different religious traditions, Radhakrishnan was trying to draw our attention to the fact that the Spirit lives in the

world, and all of us share that common bond, irrespective of the religious tradition to which we belong. Such a bond transcends the boundaries of race, cultures, and creeds. The universe is essentially spirit, and spirit is all there is. Therefore, for Radhakrishnan, this relationship has far reaching implications in the area of world-community, religious unity, and peace on earth. Thus, to say that tat tvam asi functions as a "dogma" in Radhakrishnan's philosophy is to miss the entire meaning and significance of such an affirmation.<sup>67</sup>

Radhakrishnan acknowledged the reality of the spiritual intuition of the ultimate reality of spirit, and the primacy of being or self as an intuited certainty. The Supreme in its transcendental aspect is the Absolute, and in its cosmic aspect, it is God. He maintains that this distinction is "of great significance which we should try to preserve, if we are to have a balanced view of the Supreme."<sup>68</sup> Because Absolute is not "locked up in its own transcendence. Īśvara is the Absolute in action, a Lord and creator."<sup>69</sup> What results is significant and real, not only for us, but also for the world-spirit,<sup>70</sup> because God is working in history which is "neither a chapter of accidents, nor a determined drift, but a pattern of absolute significance."<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, he rejects the interpretation of Śāṅkara that God is simply phenomenal, and Absolute is the only reality.<sup>72</sup> The world, Radhakrishnan maintains, is the creative outpouring of the conscious delight of Īśvara or God, and for the one "who has the vision of the Supreme, life, personality and history become important"<sup>73</sup> because the full meaning of the divine is brought

out as much by creation as by rest and fulfillment, since it is only the one that reveals itself as the many. The world has a "cosmic meaning" and "it tells its own story and offers its own suggestions."<sup>74</sup> In other words, the cosmic process progressively reveals the supreme, and passage to the supreme is not a cowardly flight, but an ascent, in which "life personality and history become important."<sup>75</sup> It is a passage from existence to reality, and the destiny of the world is to be transformed into the Kingdom of God, i.e., the perfect state. This world, therefore, "is not an illusion; it is not nothingness, for it is willed by God and therefore is real. its reality is radically different from the being of Absolute-God. The Absolute alone has non-created reality; all else is dependent, created reality."<sup>76</sup> Minor, however, believes that Radhakrishnan's characterization of the two aspects of the Absolute amount to a "revision" of the theistic position. He notes:

though Radhakrishnan can accept the Impersonal Absolute as a true understanding of the highest reality, he can accept, affirm, and anticipate the Absolute of the theist into his own position only as relative. What appears to Radhakrishnan to be an affirmation of a theistic position, then, is an affirmation of a revised position; the theistic affirmation is revised so as to affirm the priority of the Impersonal Absolute.<sup>77</sup>

Yet it is not clear in what sense Radhakrishnan's system involves a "revision" of the theistic affirmation. Three possible senses of revision come to mind: a) the revision in the sense of directly changing the elements that constitute a system; b) revision implying substituting one system for another on the grounds that the new system offers greater explanatory powers than the old one; and finally, c) revision in the sense of using

one system as establishing the criteria for evaluation of another system on the grounds that the former position includes those elements that are found in the latter system.

If Radhakrishnan can be said to be revising, it can only be according to the third sense of revision given above. This, however, does not mean that the other system is changed, reshaped, distorted, by virtue of its comparison with the former system. In other words, to say that the system of Radhakrishnan is "tolerant" does not imply that such a system is proposing the reshaping or reconstruction of the "lower-system," but rather, that the system of Radhakrishnan is comprehensive by being able to outline the contours of the "lower-level positions," e.g., Ramanuja.

Minor interprets Radhakrishnan in a way that illustrates "tolerance" only as the acceptance of views that "fit" the position of Radhakrishnan. Yet Radhakrishnan might have claimed that a system is tolerant only if it is capable of comprehending all possible systems in the sense of appreciating and assimilating the values that are found in other religions. I believe that Radhakrishnan held this latter view. He states:

It is not a question of fusing all religions into one but enabling each religion to assimilate whatever it can from the truths of other religions. What is needed is organic assimilation, not mere juxtaposition. There is a difference between samanvaya, or synthesis and syncretism. In a syncretism we gather together elements from different systems and throw them together without any principle or order. In a synthesis, on the other hand, there are certain definite principles from which we start and move outwards. Each religion will remain an integrated structure, but will assimilate new material. The different religions may retain their individualities, their distinctive doctrines and characteristic pieties along with a live sense of spiritual fellowship.

Minor correctly notes that there is a degree of unclarity in the relationship that exists between the role of the intellect and the intuition in Radhakrishnan.<sup>79</sup> It is also equally true that Radhakrishnan does not provide any "rational intellectual tests" for choosing what is "essential" in a religious experience. But one wonders if it is really possible for any such tests to be found by reason. Our own tests or criteria for judging in the final analysis rest upon unproven assumptions. Can we ever prove our assumptions? Perhaps not directly, yet how satisfactory they are may be reflected in their persuasive power which, of itself, can be evaluated only in some context of purpose.

What precisely was Radhakrishnan's goal and purpose? Do we find his purpose persuasive in this context? Radhakrishnan appeared at a critical time in the history of humankind when there were threats to humanity from all quarters. Scientific outlook, technological developments had created havoc, and people had lost faith in traditional religions. Divergent trends were struggling for supremacy. He was faced with the challenging task of resolving the conflicting cultural and religious tendencies and achieving a unified view of life. A rational faith to sustain a new order of life was badly needed. He notes:

We need a philosophy, a direction and a hope, if the present state of indecision is not to lead us to despair. Belief may be difficult, but the need for believing is inescapable. We are in search for a spiritual religion, that is universally valid, vital, clear-cut, one that has an understanding of the fresh sense of truth and the awakened social passion which are the prominent characteristics of the religious situation today.

This spiritual religion that has the power to heal humanity must not be confined to any one historical formulation of religion. With the world as our cultural base, it would be a mistake to limit ourselves only to the voices of Isaiah and Paul, Socrates and Cicero, the prophets of Egypt, the sages of China and the seers of India.<sup>B1</sup> Such a religion "may be called the sanātana dharma, the eternal religion. It is not to be identified with any particular religion, for it is the religion which transcends race and creed and yet informs all races and creeds."<sup>B2</sup> It is misleading to speak of different religions because there is only one "religion." This affirmation was based on the belief that truth is one although it wears the vestiges of many colors. Additionally, since every human being has within himself or herself capacity to experience the spirit, every religion is essentially the religion of the Spirit. Consequently, it attacks all dogmatic assertions that claim that theirs is "the only path" to the Divine. "The world is moving towards religious unity not on the basis of any one religious tradition but within the framework of a religion of spirit which does not abandon the past of any religion but fulfills it."<sup>B3</sup> The unity of the human race can be achieved only by an inner oneness of the aims, by pursuing aims that are universal. He was working for the emergence of a new civilization, a new culture, founded on the truths of the spirit and unity of humankind.

The method he used to accomplish this task was the method of harmony, of views, texts, and perspectives. He provided us with a new conception of samanvaya or reconciliation. This method was

used by Śaṅkara and other Vedāntic scholars to reconcile divergent Upaniṣadic principles and tendencies. Radhakrishnan extended it to "the living faiths of mankind."<sup>84</sup> Through this method he presented the "religion of the Spirit" as a religion that seeks harmony and not simply uniformity. It is universal in the sense that it is the basis of all religions. The goal is fellowship and not fusion of religions, where all individual religions may retain their individualities in a sense of spiritual fellowship and work toward one common goal.

Thus, the "religion of the Spirit" is not to be identified with any particular religious tradition, not even Vedānta. However, it does not follow that Vedānta could not give an expression to it. There is no reason why Christianity, or Buddhism, or Islam for that matter could not serve the same function. This was his hope for the future. Although he believed that Hinduism, rightly understood, can provide the basis for such a religion because in the course of its long, long history, it was able to incorporate into its structure many varieties of beliefs and religious practices which has made it a vast, complex, and subtly unified system allowing a place for all types of beliefs and practices. He categorically denies that it is the monopoly of Indian religion. In this context, we must remember that he did not treat Hinduism as a historical religion but as a mosaic of faiths. He reiterates:

In my writings my contention has been to make out that there is one perennial and universal philosophy which is found in all lands and cultures, in the seers of the Upanisads and the Buddha, Plato and Plotinus, in Hillel and Philo, Jesus and Paul and the medieval mystics of Islam. It is the spirit which binds continents and unites the ages that can

save us from the meaningless of the present situation, and not any local variant of it which we find in the Indian tradition. It is absurd to speak of Indian monopolies of philosophic wisdom. <sup>85</sup> [Emphasis Supplied]

Therefore, his "religion of the Spirit" is not to be classified as Christian, or Hindu, or Buddhist, because it is the experience of the eternal spirit that transcends all traditional formulations of religion.

In this "religion of the Spirit," both God and humans are seen as working through the Universal which guides history to its final fulfillment, brahmalok, the 'Kingdom of God' or the "Kingdom of Spirit." The Divine Absolute without losing its perfection manifests the world. The world is seen as a place where the divine is finding its telos because the world of spirit has entered into the world of non-spirit to realize one of its infinite possibilities. What results is significant not only for us but also for the world-spirit and the temporal process is not a tragedy or aberration. <sup>86</sup> God actively intervenes in the world and the individual being is asked to work with the spirit in order to reach perfection. Radhakrishnan's own involvement in national and international activities is a testimony to the fact that he considered religion to be an essential part of everyday life. His universal outlook became the basis of his political activities and he used his outlook to prevent war, to seek peace and harmony. He became a symbol of peace and an ambassador of good will.

He reinforced the traditional view of philosophy, philosophia perennis. Consequently, he did not confine it to logic or epistemology but to create a new awareness of oneself and the world. He reiterates: "Even as our political problem is to



bring East and West together in a common brotherhood which transcends racial differences, so in the world of philosophy we have to bring about a cross-fertilization of ideas."<sup>88</sup>

Radhakrishnan treated philosophy as an organic aspect of human culture. "Philosophy as logical reflection is different from philosophy as the love of wisdom. Sophia or wisdom is not mere knowledge. It is knowledge lived. It is a way of life where valid knowledge is the condition of just action."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, what was important for Radhakrishnan was the life of action, not the degree of correspondence between a set of "isms" and his own "dogmas," nor the inherent limits to the possibility of tolerance in the positive sense. Spirit, according to Radhakrishnan, was symbol of unity of a person at national and international level. It implied a world of action, an international community, a fellowship of persons. With the help of the "religion of the spirit," he outlines a philosophy which is philosophy of religion and a religious philosophy, a world faith and world-perspective at the same time.

## Footnotes

1. See especially the following articles in Philosophy East and West: N.K. Devaraja, "Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy," 12 (1967), 51-59; D.M. Datta, "On Philosophical Synthesis," 13 (1963), 195-99; and Laurence J. Rasan, "A Key to Comparative Philosophy," 2 (1952), 56-65.
2. Lawrence Hyde, "Radhakrishnan's Contribution to Universal Religion," The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1952), p. 369.
3. Ibid.
4. S. Radhakrishnan, Occasional Writings and Speeches. February, 1956--February, 1957. (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1957), p. 269.
5. S. Radhakrishnan, "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, p. 73.
6. S. Radhakrishnan, "Reply to Critics," The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, p. 814.
7. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 76.
8. S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 258-59.
9. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 7.
10. Quoted in Robert McDermott, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Philosophy," International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. X, No. 3, (September, 1970), p. 421.
11. "Reply to Critics," p. 804.
12. Ibid., p. 707.
13. Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, II.3.6.
14. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life (New Delhi: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 80.
15. Ibid., p. 272.
16. S. Radhakrishnan, "Spirit in Man," Contemporary Indian Philosophy, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan and J.H. Muirhead (London: Allen and Unwin, 1936), pp. 281-82.
17. S. Radhakrishnan, "Introduction," The Principal Upaniṣads, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 72.

18. "Reply to Critics," p. 800.
19. The Principal Upanisads, p. 90.
20. "Reply to Critics," pp. 801-02.
21. An Idealist View of Life, p. 272.
22. S. Radhakrishnan, "The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya," International Journal of Ethics, XXIV, No. 3 (April 1914), p. 440.
23. An Idealist View of Life, p. 123.
24. Ibid., p. 100.
25. Ibid., p. 137.
26. "Reply to Critics," pp. 794-95.
27. Ibid., p. 794.
28. Robert McDermott, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Philosophy," p. 426.
29. An Idealist View of Life, p. 119.
30. Ibid., p. 120.
31. "Reply to Critics," p. 803.
32. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 25.
33. S. Radhakrishnan, "Religion and World Unity," The Hibbert Journal, XLIV (April 1951), p. 224.
34. S. Radhakrishnan, Religion in a Changing World (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 224.
35. "Religion and World Unity," p. 225.
36. Ibid., p. 219.
37. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 60.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 61.
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41. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 77.
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43. S. Radhakrishnan, "Religion and Religions," in Faiths and Fellowship: Being the Proceeding of the World Congress of Faiths Held in London, July 3rd-17th, 1936, ed. by Douglas Millard (London: J.M. Watkins, 1936), p. 115.
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51. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on the Nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance," pp. 275-76.
52. "Religion and World Unity," p. 219.
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55. "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on the Nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance," p. 276.
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60. Ibid., p. 820.
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63. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, (Bombay: Blackie and Son Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977), Vol. I, pp. 50-51.
64. S. Radhakrishnan, The Brahma Sutra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 243.
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66. An Idealist View of Life, pp. 80-81.
67. "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on the Nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance," p. 281.
68. "Reply to Critics," p. 797.
69. "The Religion of the Spirit and The World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 39.
70. Ibid., p. 41.
71. Ibid., p. 30.
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73. Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 31.
74. The Brahma Sutra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life, pp. 236-38.
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76. "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need: Fragments of a Confession," p. 41.
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78. "Religion and World Unity." pp. 224-25.
79. "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on the Nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance," p. 278.
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87. Ibid., p. 13.
88. "Reply to Critics," p. 817.